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RUEHAM/AMEMBASSY AMMAN 1934  
RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT 1090  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L KUWAIT 000166

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DEPT FOR NEA/ARP, NEA/ELA, NEA/IPA AND NEA/RA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/10/2018

TAGS: PREL KPAL KU

SUBJECT: KUWAITI PRIME MINISTER TO MEET WITH SYRIA'S  
AL-ASSAD

REF: KUWAIT 0148

Classified By: CDA Misenheimer for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: On February 11, Kuwaiti PM Nasser Al Sabah, accompanied by Commerce Minister Falah Al-Hajeri and MFA U/S Khaled Al-Jarallah, departed for a regional tour of Syria, Egypt and Jordan. In Syria, the PM will express Kuwait's support for the Arab League position on Lebanon, but is not expected to raise the issue of foreign fighters transiting Syria to Iraq. End Summary.

¶2. (C) On February 11, Kuwaiti Prime Minister Shaykh Nasser Mohammed Al-Ahmed Al Sabah departed for a regional tour of Syria, Egypt and Jordan. His delegation consists of Commerce Minister Falah Fahed Mohammed Al-Hajeri and MFA U/S Khaled Al-Jarallah. While in Syria, the PM will reportedly meet with Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad to discuss bilateral relations and trade development. According to Nayef Al-Otaibi, Second Secretary with the MFA Arab Affairs Department, Shaykh Nasser will encourage the Government of Syria to end the political standoff in Lebanon and support Lebanese Armed Forces Commander Michel Sleiman for president.

¶3. (C) Al-Otaibi said the PM will hew to the Arab League position on Syrian interference in Lebanon and will reiterate its threat to re-locate the March 2008 Arab Summit from Damascus. He said Iran and Syria's strategy in Lebanon is to prolong the political crisis through a series of unending negotiations. According to Al-Otaibi, Syria still believes in its sovereignty over Lebanon, citing the absence of a Syrian Embassy in Beirut. He said that the Baath party controls Syrian policy and Al-Assad is afraid to confront the Syrian establishment directly.

¶4. (C) Al-Otaibi said he does not expect the PM to raise the issue of foreign fighters transiting Syria en route to Iraq. General Petraeus raised this issue with the Amir on February 4 (reftel).

¶5. (C) Comment: The Kuwaiti PM's visit to Damascus, coming in close proximity to the February 14 anniversary of Hariri's 2005 assassination, poses the awkward question of how the GOK will reconcile its USD 5 million contribution to the Tribunal with a clear overture to boost commercial and financial ties with Syria. As on other issues, the GOK hopes to maintain a fine balance between competing interests and avoid offending either side. End comment.

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MISENHEIMER